

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING CENTER

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SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES
EMTBT NO. 10
DATE Jan. 26, 2009
BILL NO. SB 101

January 26, 2009

Senator Kelly Gebhardt
Chair, Natural Resources Committee
Montana Senate
P.O. Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

RE: Senate Bill 101 – Certification of Wastewater Collection System Operators

Dear Senator Gebhardt,

As a professional in the water and wastewater industry in Montana for the past 16 years as a training and development specialist, university instructor, researcher, wastewater treatment plant operator, collection system operator, water treatment plant operator, distribution system operator and currently training center director I can attest to the importance of SB101 becoming law in Montana.

So as someone who has in recent years been a wastewater treatment plant operator and a collection system operator for both a larger system in Montana and a smaller system in Montana I know first hand the importance of having qualified professionals working not only in water and wastewater treatment plant but also in water distribution systems and wastewater collection systems. At the larger system I was responsible for checking wastewater collection system lift stations on the weekend shift. At the smaller system I was the wastewater collection system operator. Had it not been for my college education in water and wastewater and participating in training seminars as an operator, a training and development specialist and a training center director I would not have known of the operation and maintenance issues associated with wastewater collection systems let alone the safety and health hazards associated with wastewater collection systems.

It is just as important to have qualified professionals in responsible charge of the wastewater collection systems as it is to have qualified professionals in responsible charge of the water distribution systems. Both systems are expensive to maintain and repair. Both systems are responsible for protecting public health. A distribution system must provide safe drinking water to every tap where as a collection system must provide safe removal of human waste from every toilet. As a collection system operator you:

- 1) Must not only know where your collection system lines are but also know how to repair the lines properly and safely.
- 2) Are responsible for your safety and the safety of fellow employees and contractors when repairing a collection system break.
- 3) Must know the rules and regulations of trenching and shoring to protect yourself and others.
- 4) Must know the rules and regulations for entering and working in confined spaces to protect yourself and others.
- 5) Must know what types of hazardous gases can be in collection lines and protect yourself and others.



- 6) Must know what types of waterborne diseases can be in collection lines and protect yourself and others.
- 7) Must know what types of pipes, valves and pumps can be used in wastewater collection systems.

Wastewater treatment plant operators and collection system operators must work with water that is contaminated with microorganisms which cause waterborne disease. The very same microorganisms that water treatment plant operators and distribution system operators work desperately to keep out of our drinking water. Collection system operators subject themselves to the possibility of contracting cholera, dysentery, giardiasis, cryptosporidiosis, hepatitis B and C and other diseases which have the potential to be fatal and start epidemics.

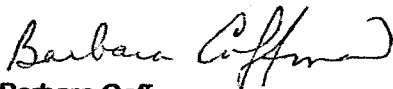
In both the larger and smaller wastewater collection systems where I was employed I felt responsible to stop coworkers and contractors and question their safety practices related to trenching and shoring, confined space entry and microbiological hazards. In most instances the coworkers and contractors claimed to not have knowledge of the dangers they could be facing. If these coworkers and contractors were certified and had been to training they could not have claimed ignorance.

I have a good friend who contracted hepatitis C a few years ago from working with contaminated water and I myself have suffered the ill effects of giardiasis. While I have recovered from the giardiasis my 50 something friend has not recovered from hepatitis C and is in need of a liver transplant.

To neglect the fact that wastewater collection system operators must be as well educated as water distribution system operators is ludicrous. But, neglect is going on right now without requiring wastewater collection systems operators in Montana to be certified and earn continuing education credits. By requiring certification and continuing education of wastewater collection system operators Montana would be protecting the safety and health of wastewater collection system operators, the public, and contractors hired to make repairs to collection systems.

I strongly urge you to bring SB101 to the legislature for a passing vote.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Senators – Debby Barrett, Ken Hansen, Christine Kaufman, Jim Keane, Gary Perry, Jim Peterson, Donald Steinbeisser, Mitch Tropila, David Wanzenried, Rick Ripley, Jerry Black and Ken Hansen. Representatives - Russell Bean, Llew Jones, Bob Bergren and Roy Hollandsworth.